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ABSTRACT

The military reserves are an attractive source of potential students for colleges attempting to recruit from non-traditional pools. To help colleges plan service delivery strategies and design programs attractive to this group, a study was undertaken to construct a profile of members of the military reserves. The Army National Guard of Texas was selected to participate because of its structure and accessibility. An easy-to-administer survey was developed to gather demographic information and to determine the reservists' knowledge about the military's trend toward requiring more education, the types of courses desired, and any barriers perceived by the reservist to attending college. A sample of 250 reservists, about 94% male, responded to the questionnaire. Most reservists were aware of the need for additional education; 32.2% of 239 respondents said that they were below the established goal for their military grades. About 39% planned to enroll in college courses, with the majority planning a degree program. Just over half of these planned to choose business or administration fields. About three-fifths expressed interest in courses delivered by television. In general, age was not perceived as a barrier to further education. The information obtained through this survey presents a picture of a group largely underserved by institutions of higher education. The survey regarding reserve personnel attitudes toward education is attached. (SLD)

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Potential Student Group Profile: The Reserves

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ABSTRACT

A descriptive study dealing with a potential source of new college students numbering 1.5 million nationwide. The study represents a sample drawn from the Texas Army National Guard and indicates awareness of educational needs, program interests, perceived obstacles, and supporting demographic data of interest to institutional recruiting efforts.

Colleges are increasing their efforts to recruit students from the nontraditional pool. This effort is necessary because of a shrinking of the group usually supplying college students. Also, the concept of lifelong learning is being more widely accepted. A source that colleges would do well in exploring consists of the more than 1.5 million men and women in the several military service's reserve components. As a unified membership group they are a natural for the delivery of many forms of adult education. Members of the reserves have access to funds earmarked for tuition payment through a number of programs, the most notable being the Montgomery GI Bill. Reservists are familiar with the concept of lifelong learning as they pass through the levels of military education and training.

Reservists are under pressure from two directions to obtain additional education. First, there is a concerted effort to link continuing education with military promotion. Already the U.S. Army has established that members of the reserves must meet certain levels of education in order to maintain membership or gain higher rank. For example, all commissioned officers must have a bachelors degree and warrant officers must have the equivalent of an associate degree. Enlisted persons are also feeling the pressure to obtain post-secondary educational credits. Second, there are aspects of technology at work that press the demand for more education. The reserves are shouldering more and more mission responsibilities relating to national defense. This means that they are acquiring increasingly sophisticated equipment. Success in accomplishing their new missions and for operating the sophisticated equipment requires a much better educated work force.

The Army National Guard has been the most proactive in trying to arrange linkage between themselves and colleges throughout the nation. They have established in each state's guard force a special staff officer to deal with academic educational services. The National Guard Bureau has sponsored a number of meetings to forge a steady line of communication between the guard and post-secondary educational institutions, primarily two-year colleges. The ESO tries to encourage institutions to be creative in serving the constituency he represents.

There have been some success stories and stories where the mark was completely missed. Unsuccessful attempts to serve the reserves usually stem from a lack of knowledge. Many colleges do not have an accurate or well developed picture of the average reserve component member as a potential adult student. The purpose of the study undertaken was to develop a picture of a reserve aggregation, to establish a profile.

An easy to administer survey was developed to gather information from any general reserve population. In addition to basic demographic
information, it was necessary to find out the reservist's degree of knowledge about the trend toward requiring more education, the type of courses or programs most favored, and the barriers, if any, perceived by the reservist that would affect attending college. This essential information would allow a college to formulate delivery strategies and programs designs that would attract members from this market while attending to their needs.

For a number of reasons, primarily accessibility, force size, and an expressed interest, the Army National Guard of Texas was first to participate in the survey. Copies of the questionnaire were provided to the ESO for distribution on a convenience basis. A sample with an N of 250 was gathered in this manner. The returns indicated a number of interesting findings. These findings relate to courses and programs of greatest interest, methods of delivery seen as most attractive to the target audience, and the nature of the perceived barriers. Educational institutions can gain insights from this presentation about a major potential student population.

Introduction

Identifying new sources of students is a matter of growing concern for many colleges. The pool of traditional-aged students is a shrinking one. One source for investigation are the persons who belong to the Reserve Components of the Armed Forces.

The Reserves

There are currently in excess of 1.5 million men and women serving in the various reserves of the United States Armed Forces (Cook, 1988). In the last five years the size of the reserves has increased twelve percent. Reservists of all branches are receiving pressure from several directions to obtain more education. The reserves have recognized that education focused only on military subjects will not meet their needs. Taking the US Army, for example, members on active duty and in reserve status are seeing a trend linking promotions with civilian education. All commissioned officers must hold a four-year degree. Warrant Officers must have the equivalent of two years of college credits. These, and other goals, are found in the Army's primary regulation pertaining to education, Army Regulation 621-5. Noncommissioned officers and other enlisted persons are finding themselves more competitive for promotion when they have earned college credits. Military periodicals speculate on a formal linkage of college and promotion for enlisted ranks, both active and reserve, in the near future.

How Do Reservists Feel About College?

For colleges wanting to investigate the reserves as a potential source of students, it will be necessary to gain a feeling of their perception about continuing education. This paper sets out the findings based on a questionnaire given to a random group belonging to the Texas Army National Guard. The questionnaire was designed to gain information about the groups' interests for formal and informal programs, their choice of academic fields, and what they see as barriers to entering college. This questionnaire also sampled their understanding about the trend toward the increasing educational requirements. It was seen as important to sample their perceptions about gaining credit for life experiences and nontraditional education. A copy of the questionnaire is attached at inclosure 1.

The Army National Guard of Texas was selected to participate in this project because of its force structure. Copies of the questionnaire were provided the Educational Service Officer (ESO), a special staff officer of the State Adjutant General. His distribution of 250 copies throughout the state's units provided the data as indicated below.

Item 1. Gender: (N=246) 5.2 percent of those responding were female and 94.3 percent were male.

Item 2. Age: (N=244) 18 percent of those responding were between 17 and 26 years of age, 16 percent were between 27 to 31 years of age, 13.5 percent were between 32 to 36 years of age, 20 percent were between 37 and 41 years of age, and 32 percent were 42 years of age and older.

Item 3. Active Duty: (N=237) 30 percent indicated no active duty beyond six-months. 23.2 percent indicated two to three years of active duty. 23.6 percent indicated four to six years of active duty. 22.8 percent indicated seven or more years of active duty.

Item 4. Military Jobs: (N=242) 59.1 percent indicated three or more formal military job classifications. 23.1 percent indicated they had two job classifications. 17.8 percent indicated they had only one job classification.

Item 5. Military Rank: (N=242) 16.1 percent indicated they were in pay grades E1 to E4. 43.4 percent indicated they were in pay grades E5 to E7. 7 percent indicated they were in pay grades E8 or E9. 13 percent indicated they were company grade (lieutenants and captains) officers. 9.5 percent indicated they were field grade (majors and lieutenant colonels) officers. 2.9 percent indicated they were colonels or higher. 7.4 percent of those responding indicated they were Warrant Officers.

Item 6. Awareness of Educational Requirements: (N=242) 64.5 percent indicated they had full awareness of current goals. 35.5 percent indicated they were not fully aware.

Item 7. Perception of Current Educational Status: (N=239) 32.2 percent of those responding indicated they were below the established goal for their grade. 44.4 percent indicated they were at the goal set for their grade. 23.4 percent indicated they were above any established goal.

Item 8. Current Enrollment Status: (N=241) 33.5 percent indicated a

current enrollment in some form of continuing education.

Item 9. Projected Enrollment: (N=223) 38.8 percent of those responding indicated the goal would cause them the enroll. 60.9 percent indicated that the goals would not cause them to enroll. Almost 9 percent left this item blank.

Item 10. Degree Program Track: (N=237) 73.1 percent indicated they would enter a degree track program. 26.5 percent indicated they wanted to pick and choose courses randomly.

Item 11. Educational Focus - Military or Civilian Job: (N=237) 36.3 percent indicated they would take courses related to their civilian employment. 35 percent indicated they would take courses related to their military occupation. 28.7 percent indicated they would enroll in courses covering areas they just wanted to know more about.

Item 12. Curriculum: (N=236) 8.9 percent indicated they would enter a liberal arts program. 8.5 percent indicated a choice for the sciences. 11 percent indicated a choice in high-technical fields. 15 percent indicated a choice of vocational-technical fields. 56.4 percent indicated a choice of business or administration fields.

Item 13. The Army's Right to Set a Goal: (N=237) 40.8 percent indicated that the Army does not have the right to link promotions to an educational goal. 58.8 percent indicated that such a link was acceptable.

Item 14. Perceived Value of Education: (N=237) 29.1 percent indicated they were unsure that additional education would benefit them. 70.9 percent

indicated they would be better at their job with more education.

Item 15. Perceived Biggest Obstacle: (N=226) 86.6 percent indicated that scheduling education into their life was the biggest problem. 8.4 percent indicated having to take course work not cared for was the biggest obstacle. 4.4 percent indicated their biggest obstacle was overcoming a negative feeling about school.

Item 16. Actual Distance to a College: (N=239) 54 percent indicated they lived within ten miles of a college. 23 percent indicated they lived from eleven to nineteen miles of a college. 13.8 percent indicated they lived from twenty to twenty-nine miles of a college. 9.2 percent indicated they lived more than thirty miles from a college.

Item 17. Payment of Tuition: (N=233) 48.3 percent indicated they would use the Montgomery GI Bill or, some other military sponsored tuition assistance program. 41.9 percent indicated they would pay tuition costs out of their own pocket. 9.4 percent indicated that loans would be used for tuition costs.

Item 18. Credit For Experience: (N=234) 23.5 percent indicated an expectation of receiving up to 15 hours of credit for experience since high school. 13.7 percent indicated an expectation of receiving between 16 and 29 credit hours for experience since high school. 62.8 indicated an expectation of receiving 30 or more credit hours for experience since high school.

Item 19. Perception of Age: (N=233) 5.2 percent indicated feeling their age would keep them from enrolling. 94.8 percent indicate that their age had no bearing on enrollment.

Item 20. Course Delivery Strategy: (N=236) 59.7 percent indicated an attraction to television or television based instruction. 40.3 percent indicated they were not attracted by television used to deliver courses.

Item 21. Peer Pressure: (N=236) 98.7 percent indicated they would resist negative peer pressure when considering enrollment in college.

Comments and Explanations

The above data can be examined in a variety of ways. Some of the data holds significant meaning for the National Guard as it relates to internal programs. Beyond that, the National Guard will be trying to assist their members to meet certain mutual needs. In that way, the data has meaning to colleges that want to assist the persons the Guard is seeking to help. I have provided below comments about the findings. These comments are framed from the college point of view. Not every item of the questionnaire is addressed but, I have retained the original item number to reduce confusion.

Item 2. Age: The National Guard in Texas, and in most states, has a wide variety of age groups. It would be too simplistic to split them into just a younger and an older segment at some arbitrary point. Recruitment of members from the reserves will not only have to take into account the age of the person but, also, the rank, longevity of service and position or job.

Item 3. Active Duty: Persons who have served longer periods of active duty will be different from those with only minimal active service in two

areas. First, having been part of the military continuing education process,
they will tend to understand and identify with it more strongly. In this way, these persons can serve
as positive centers of influence in the recruitment of others. This longer-service group will also have increased expectations for the award of credit based on military schooling and experience. There will also be a link in this aspect with the number of military occupations held.

Item 5. Military Rank: As a general rule, the enlisted persons withing any organization will have a wider range of educational needs than the officer group. These enlisted persons will also have access to military-sponsored tuition support programs that officers don't.

Item 8. Current Enrollment Status: It should be pointed out that this item was not constructed to differentiate; some of those responding in the positive could be doing military home-study courses or taking an arts and crafts class at a local community center.

Item 9. Projected Enrollment: Almost nine percent of those responding to the questionnaire left this item blank. When considering the total population this sample represents, that is a large group. There is no way, however, to determine if this was a method of indicating their mind was not made up, or if some other factor was at work in this case.

Item 10. Degree Program Track: As rule, colleges much prefer to have students enrolled in degree track programs. Most systems are keyed to track

and manage they category of student better than any other variety. The
potential of working with a large unified group having a need and an attractive financial support system should excite the college recruiter.

Item 11. Educational Focus - Civilian or Military Job: More than one-fourth of those responding indicated a desire to just know more about things that interest them. This kind of learner, one with no apparent ulterior motive, is unique. They may be the easiest to recruit and with their needs satisfied, be centers of influence to draw others into courses and programs.

Item 12: Curriculum: While some members of the Guard indicated a preference each academic area listed, the majority indicated a preference for the business and administrative area. This is in line with most previously conducted surveys of military and veteran populations since the end of the Korean War (Drew & Creager, 1972).

Item 13. The Army's Right to Set a Goal: If a college chooses to work with this type of group it will be important to remember that two-fifths did not think the Army should be setting a civilian educational goal. Approaches to this group will need strategy that sells education on its own merits or as a worthy endeavor beyond the Army point of view.

Item 15 and Item 20. Perceived Biggest Obstacle and Course Delivery Strategy: These two items should be considered together. The question is not just the method of delivery but includes the time of day, the day of the

week, and the place of delivery. If the scheduling problems of this group are to be overcome it will be because colleges were willing and able to develop truly fresh ideas. One thought to be shared is that innovation in the place of delivery or manner does not automatically mean lowered academic standards. I think it is important to notice that of the three-fifths of those responding as attracted to television based instruction, almost 75 percent were in the 32 and older age groups. Perhaps the younger age groups see television only as an entertainment medium.

Item 18. Credit for Experience: This group has generally shown a positive appreciation for the concept of experiential learning. Institutions that come to serve this group will almost have to develop some form of the portfolio assessment process, extensive use of the American Council on Education' Guide for the evaluation of military service and training, or locally approved strategy to give academic recognition. In working with a large number of reserve component personnel from several services the author has seen recommendations ranging from 4 credit hours for a service person just completing basic training up to a 65 credit hour recommendation for a senior noncommissioned officer who had 25 years of service.

Item 19. Perception of Age: With all but five percent saying that age does not enter into the question of enrolling there is a very positive oriented group seen here. In fact, the Guard's results almost eliminates one of the more commonly mentioned barriers associated with adults not returning to school that previous surveys mention.

Summary

Here, then, is the profile of a large group of potential students, all packaged on one membership group. That aspect alone should be of interest to the college recruiter. At the present time they can be considered an under served population. My impression is that colleges have either ignored the reserve units or seen them only as a place where some traditional age group students congregate once a month. For several years now, missions of national defense have been assigned to the nation's reserve components. There is no reason to feel this will change in the 90's. With these additional missions comes more sophisticated equipment and the requirement for better educated citizen-soldiers. The potential for colleges is almost limitless. At the present time colleges are delivering courses and even degree programs right in the drill hall. In some instances colleges are even providing military skills training by contract (Reed, 1987)(Watt, 1988). Having worked in this market area, the author knows that the reserves would enjoy your contact.

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A SURVEY REGARDING
RESERVE PERSONNEL ATTITUDE TOWARD EDUCATION

This survey has been designed to gain information needed by colleges that intend to provide educational services to the Reserve Components. Completion of this survey is voluntary. When filled out, the information will be absolutely anonymous. A pre-paid envelope has been provided for your convenience. Thank you for your assistnace in this important research.

1. My sex is _____ female _____ male

2. My age is _____ 17-21 _____ 22-26 _____ 27-31 _____ 32-36
_____ 37-41 _____ 42+

3. Extended active duty service (in excess of 180 days)
_____ none _____ 2-3 yrs. _____4-6 yrs. _____ 7 or more yrs.

4. I have had the following number of MOS during my military service.
_____ 1 _____ 2 _____ 3-4 _____ 5 or more

5. My grade is: _____ E1 to E4 _____ E5 to E7 _____ E8 to E9
_____ 01 to 03 _____ 04 to 05 _____ 06 to 08
_____ WO1 _____ WO2 to WO4

6. I am fully aware of the new educational requirements established by the Department of Defense. _____ Yes _____ No

7. At the present time, I am

_____ below the goal for my rank/length of service.
_____ equal to the goal for my rank/length of service.
_____ above the goal for my rank/length of service.

8. I am currently enrolled in some type of continuing education.
_____ Yes _____ No

9. The new Department of Defense educational requirements will cause me to enroll in college courses. _____ Yes _____ No

10. If I enroll for continuing education courses it will most likely be
_____ an unrelated series of courses.
_____ a degree producing program.

11. My preference for college courses would be those related to
_____ my civilian job.
_____ my military specialty.
_____ things I just want to know more about.

12. The college program area of greatest interest to me is in
_____ the liberal arts. _____ the sciences _____ high technology
_____ vocational-technical field _____ business or administration

13. I don't think that the Army has the right to link my promotions and retention to continuing education. _____ agree _____disagree

14. I'm not convinced that more education will help me do better in my job, civilian or military. _____ agree _____disagree

15. The <u>biggest</u> obstacle to overcome, if I enroll for college, will be
_____ fitting college into my existing schedule.
_____ taking coureses in subjects I'm not interested in.
_____ overcoming my basic dislike of schools.

16. The one-way distance to the nearest 2 or 4 year college from where I live is
___ 0-10 miles. ___ 11-19 miles. ___ 20-29 miles. ___30+miles.

17. To pay for any college courses, I would
____ use GI Bill. ____ pay my own way. ____borrow the money.

18. I think college credits awarded for all I have done and learned since leaving highschool would add up to
_____ 0-15 hours. _____ 16-29 hours. _____ 30+ hours.

19. I would like to go to college but, I don't think I would do well because it is for people younger than me.
_____ agree _____disagree

20. I would take college courses if they were available on VCR tapes or, televised so I could do them at home.
_____ agree _____ disagree

21. Even if I wanted to continue my education I'm afraid that my friends would make fun of me. _____ agree _____ disagree